



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

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## HISTORY OF IRON MINING IN AUSTRALIA

### 1. GENERAL

The fact that iron-ore is widely distributed throughout the Commonwealth has long been known, and extensive deposits have been discovered from time to time at various places in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania. It will appear, however, from what is stated below that until quite recently but little has been done in the way of converting these deposits into a marketable commodity.

**The Manufacturers' Encouragement Act 1908.** It is hoped that the passing by the Commonwealth Parliament of the Manufacturers' Encouragement Act, which was assented to on the 14th December, 1908, will assist in firmly establishing the iron industry in Australia on a remunerative basis, both in the smelting of pig iron and in the production of bar iron and steel from Australian ore. Judging by the increased activity and output already manifested at the iron works at Lithgow, in New South Wales, it would appear that there are reasonable prospects of these hopes being realised in the near future. The Act referred to provides for the payment of a bounty not exceeding £30,000 per annum on all pig iron, puddled bar iron and steel, made from Australian ore and pig iron respectively, on the following basis:-

### **BOUNTIES PAYABLE ON AUSTRALIAN PIG IRON, BAR IRON, AND STEEL**

Description of Goods	Rate of Bounty	Total amount which may be authorised	Date of Expiry of bounty
Pig iron made from Australian ore	12s per ton	£150,000	30th June 1914
Puddled bar iron made from Australian pig iron	„	£150,000	30th June 1914
Steel made from Australian pig iron	„	£150,000	30th June 1914

The Act also provides for the payment of bounties on galvanised sheet or plate iron or steel, on wire and wire netting, and on iron or steel tubes or pipes.

### 2. HISTORY

#### **New South Wales**

The existence of large deposits of iron ore in New South Wales has been known since the early years of the history of the State, but until quite recently little was accomplished in the way of

utilising these deposits so as to produce any extensive supply of marketable metal. According to a report furnished by the Government Geologist in 1905, the total quantity of ore available for exploitation is 53,000,000 tons, the deposits at Cadia, near Orange, being computed to contain no less than 39,000,000 tons, of which a large proportion consists of ores capable of yielding a high-grade metal. The aluminous ores at Wingello are estimated to contain 3,000,000 tons, the titaniferous magnetic ores on the Williams and Karuah Rivers nearly 2,000,000, tons, the hematite and brown ores at Carcoar, 3,000,000 tons; while several other districts are capable of supplying over 1,000,000 tons. There are extensive supplies of coal and limestone within reasonable distance of some of the more extensive deposits. The increasing demand for iron and steel manufactures and the enhanced price of the metal, will probably enable the State in the near future to take its place amongst the iron-producing countries of the world. Ironworks were established at Fitzroy, near Mittagong, as far back as 1852, and at Eskbank, near Lithgow, in 1875, but the production of pig iron and manufactures was in neither case considerable. In May, 1907, however, works on a much larger scale were opened at Lithgow, and in January, 1908, they were taken over by the firm of G. and C. Hoskins (Limited). Work was interrupted for some weeks in 1908 owing to a dispute with the men respecting wages, and during this period the opportunity was taken to make considerable additions and alterations to the plant, rolling mills, etc., with the object of increasing the output. The ironstone used in this establishment was obtained at Carcoar, where the deposit is calculated to yield 2000 tons of ore for a period of twenty-five years. During 1908 the ore raised amounted to 51,206 tons. The following materials were also received at the blast furnace:-Limestone, 22,467 tons; coke, 36,134 tons; and slag, 5637 tons. The output was 30,393 tons of pig iron, valued at £98,777. In addition the iron and steel, bars, castings, etc., made from scrap, were valued at £19,447, while 3946 tons of steel ingots, valued at £21,703, were also manufactured. The mine and works employed 632 hands, and the wages paid amounted to £74,472. The following table shows the quantity and value of finished iron, pig iron, etc., made in New South Wales during the last five years, chiefly from scrap iron, but partly from the smelting of iron ore:-

#### **NEW SOUTH WALES - PRODUCTION OF IRON, 1904 to 1908**

Particulars		1904	1905	1906	1907*	1908†
Quantity	Tons	6,303	4,447	8,000	29,902	40,207
Value	£	80,504	85,693	112,848	178,632	118,224

\* Includes 18,631 tons pig iron, valued at £60,550, produced from 34,500 tons of iron ore raised within the State. † Includes 30,393 tons pig iron, valued at £98,777, from 51,206 tons of ore raised within the State.

A quantity of iron oxide is purchased by the various gasworks for use in purifying gas, the output in New South Wales being drawn from the deposits at Port Macquarie and Mittagong. During 1908 the quantity raised was 1827 tons, valued at £1857, while the total output to the end of that year was 12,102 tons, valued at £17,945. The quantity of ironstone disposed of for flux in New South Wales during 1908 exhibits a decrease, since the requirements of the smelting companies were diminished. In 1908 the quantity raised was 8087 tons, valued at £6199, as against 10,659 tons, valued at £7707, in the preceding year.

### **Victoria**

Iron ore has been located at various places in Victoria, particularly at Nowa Nowa, in the Gippsland district, and at Dookie. In his report for 1905 the Secretary for Mines states that without special assistance to the industry there does not seem to be any prospect of the deposits being cheaply worked.

### **Queensland**

Queensland possesses some extensive deposits of iron ore, which is mined chiefly for fluxing purposes in connection with the reduction of gold and copper ores. During the year 1908, 48,047 tons of ironstone were procured at Iron Island in the Rockhampton district, to be used as fluxes at the Mount Morgan mine.

### **South Australia**

In South Australia iron ore is raised for fluxing purposes only, although the State possesses some rich deposits capable of being mined for an indefinite period. The best known deposit is the Iron Knob, a veritable hill of iron of high percentage, situated about forty miles W.S.W. from Port Augusta. This property has been leased by the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, the ore being transported to the smelting works at Port Pirie. Extensive beds of limonite with a little hematite are found at Cutana, near Mingary, and it was from this district that the Broken Hill Company at one time obtained ore for fluxing purposes. At Mount Jagged, where a small quantity of pig iron was made about thirty-five years ago, there are large deposits of hematite. Ore beds of varying extent have been located at Peralilla, near Port Victor, at Oodia Wirra, at Donnelly's, near Quorn, and several other localities.

The estimated quantity of iron ore in sight at the Iron Knob and Iron Monarch has been set down at 21,000,000 tons.

### **Western Australia**

This State has some very rich deposits of iron ore, but owing to their geographical position the most extensive fields at the present time are practically unexploited, the production in the State being confined chiefly to that needed for fluxing purposes. The Murchison field possesses some extensive deposits of high grade ore. It is proposed to work the deposits on Koolan Island at Yampi Sound with a view to exporting the ore for fluxing purposes in connection with the Mount Morgan gold mines, Queensland.

### **Tasmania**

The existence of large quantities of iron ore in Tasmania was noted as far back as 1822, when Surveyor-General Evans alluded to the "surprising abundance of iron within a few miles of Launceston." A company known as the Tasmanian Charcoal Iron Company was formed to work these deposits, and commenced operations in June, 1876. Unfortunately, however, the presence of chromium rendered the pig iron so hard and brittle that the works had to be abandoned. Extensive deposits of specular iron ore are also found in the neighbourhood of the Blythe and Gawler Rivers. The total production of iron ore in 1908 was 3600 tons, valued at £1600, and was all raised by the Tasmanian iron mines at Penguin.

### **World's Production of Iron, 1908**

The quantity of iron produced in Australia is but a very small proportion of the world's production, which in 1908 amounted to 48,180,000 tons (pig iron). The leading position for magnitude of production is held by the United States, which in 1908 produced 15,936,018 tons, compared with Germany's 11,813,511 tons, and Great Britain's 9,239,840 tons. The position of the three countries named is similar to what it has been for several years past.

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